

ARCHAEOLOGICAL OBSERVATIONS CONCERNING THE ROMAN CONQUEST OF THE AREA OF THE DACIAN KINGDOM'S CAPITAL

Research undertaken in the sites within the region of the capital of the Dacian kingdom underlined the archaeological situation which had occurred parallel to their destruction by the Romans during the second Dacian war. The impact of the Roman conquest upon the defensive, civilian and cult buildings had been extremely tough in the above mentioned region, and the subsequent result had been the total lack of further evidence of native presence; on the other hand it led to the implantation of Roman garrisons which had the mission to pacify and surveil the area.

The microregion of the Grădiște valley (see Fig. 1) and the Luncani Platform, marked by the fortifications, civilian buildings and religious ones was obviously the most densely populated of Dacia at the time, even more densely populated than it is today¹. Surface and archaeological investigations brought to light a series of remnants both diverse and relevant to the level attained by the native population between the 1st century B.C. and the end of the 1st century A.D.².

The main fortresses of the region have been largely studied with the exception of Virful lui Hulpe³; for those investigated the stages of construction have been clarified and the chronology established. There remains the problem of their end and their fate after the two imperial campaigns at the beginning of the second century A.D.

The fortress of Costești is the oldest link in the entire system of fortifications and consequently has the most complex evolution as regards the construction stages. Three main stages have been underlined. The fortress had been partly destroyed during the war of 101 — 102 A.D., there had been a reconstruction during the short period of peace, when the main entrance in the stone precinct was blocked with plinths of columns from one of the sanctuaries and the so-called "red rampart" was erected (containing traces from burned dwellings and which is built partially upon one of the limestone towers of the precinct. After the final siege (105 — 106 A.D.) during the last Roman war, all dwelling within both the fortified acropolis and the village below ceased⁴. From the time of the siege there is a small Roman *castellum*, with a rampart and ditch, on a terrace at the foot of the fortress⁵. It proves that the siege of the fortress lasted longer than expected and made necessary a retracing of the lines of assault. Within the Daci-

¹ Cf. C. Daicoviciu, A. Ferenczi, *Așezările dacice din Munții Orăștiei*, București, 1951, p. 43.

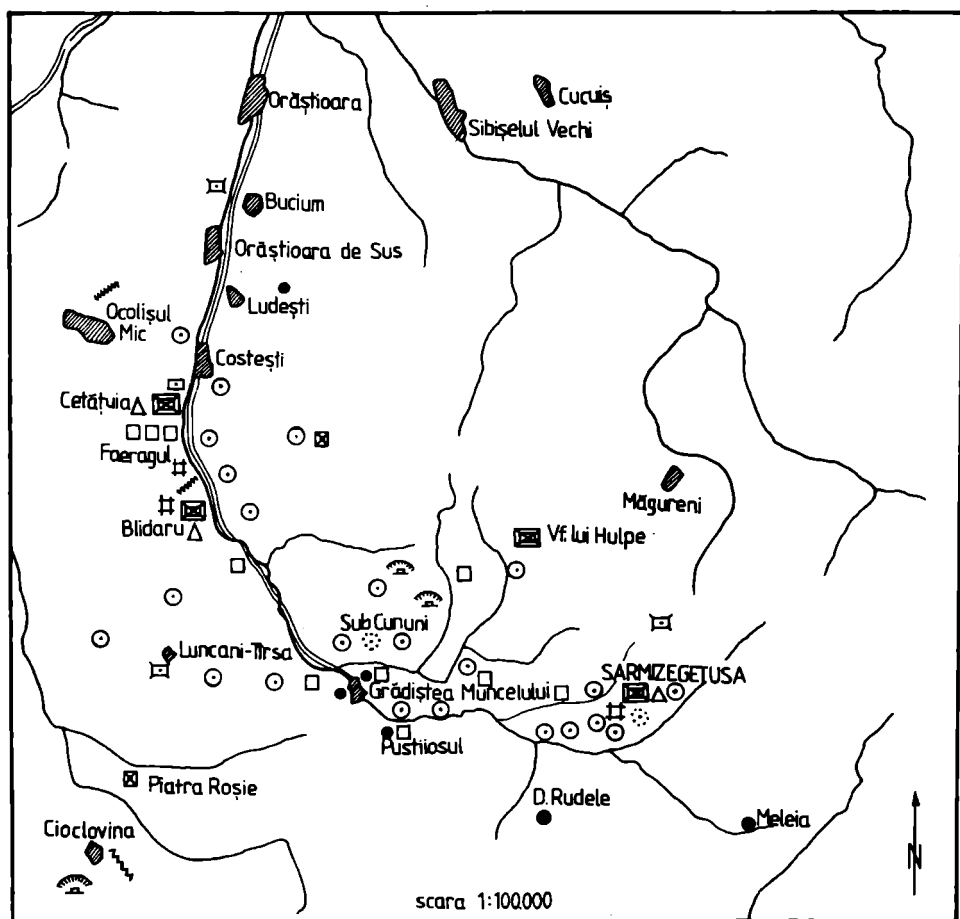
² Only a few titles from a long list of books and studies concerning various aspects of the Dacian civilisation: C. Daicoviciu, *Cetatea dacică de la Piatra Roșie*, București, 1954; H. Daicoviciu, *Dacia de la Burebista la cucerirea romană*, Cluj, 1972; H. Daicoviciu, I. Glodariu, I. Piso, *Un complex de construcții în terase din așezarea dacică de la Fetele Albe, ActaMN, X, 1973, p. 65—96*; I. Glodariu, *Dacian Trade with the Hellenistic and Roman World*, BAR, Supplementary Series 8, 1976; I.H. Crișan, *Burebista și epoca sa*, București, 1977; I. Glodariu, E. Iaroslavski, *Civilizația fierului la daci*, Cluj, 1979; I. Glodariu, *Arhitectura dacilor. Civilă și militară*, Cluj, 1986, et caetera.

³ H. Daicoviciu, Șt. Ferenczi, I. Glodariu, *Cetăți și așezări dacice în sud-vestul Transilvaniei*, București, 1989, p.

⁴ Idem, *op. cit.*, p. 178—180.

⁵ Idem, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

an fortress traces of fire are noticable testifying to the final destruction of the dwelling-towers, the pallisade and all other wooden structures. A similar fate was shared by the smaller sized fortifications which were satellites to the fortress of Costești — "Ciocuța", "Dilma Brăitei" and "Cetățuia înaltă". These smaller fortresses were in fact Dacian defense towers⁶.



1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13

Fig. 1. — *The Monuments of the Grădiște valley*: 1. Fortified center, made of stonewalls and towers; 2. Civilian settlements; 3. Isolated fortress made of stonewalls; 4. Isolated tower; 5. Rampart; 6. Group of dwellings; 7. Sanctuary; 8. Cistern; 9. Dacian terra-cotta water pipe; 10. Roman fort; 11. Roman watch tower; 12. Other Roman findings; 13. Cave.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

Blidaru, the second fortress up the valley towards Sarmizegetusa Regia, has two main stages of construction⁷. It doesn't seem to have suffered the effects of a serious fire, there are no significant traces of burning, and there seems to have been a single level of destruction, the final one. Consequently the second, enlarged, stone precinct dates back to the period previous to the two Roman wars against the Dacians, and not to the "interwar" period. An argument in favour of this assumption is the fact that the second precinct of Blidaru is built from blocks of limestone, while in Costești, which is more accessible, the reconstruction made between the two wars the earthen and wooden rampart.

If Blidaru was conquered this could only have happened during the second war and only by surrender or abandonment of the fortress. The only means of conquest would have been the use of war-machines which was highly impossible because of the character of the land. Blidaru was probably surrendered because of the lack of water reserves within the precinct. As regards the first war, the most plausible explanation for the Roman penetration beyond the fortress, supposing that it hadn't surrendered was its continuous siege by a part of the army while the rest of it advanced up the valley with the flank and rear protected. It is necessary to mention also the presence of at least 14 watch and defense towers along the route from Costești to Blidaru.

The fortress "Piatra Roșie" ("The Red Rock") meant to defend the capital from the west of the region, has two stages of development. C. Daicoviciu's research⁸ proves that the final destruction of the fortress during the wars with Trajan. The author shows that there is only one level of destruction, a final one. There are no traces of fire within the stone precinct with the exception of tower B advanced and included in the second stage of development in the enlarged precinct. The fire destroyed the wooden structures while the stone walls were dismantled. More abundant archaeological material was found only in the burned tower and buildings which leads us to assume that the rest of the buildings had been abandoned willingly or forcefully, the inhabitants having taken the inventory with them which could explain its scarcity in the buildings not affected by the fire⁹.

The residential complex "Fețele Albe" which is closest to the capital had a similar fate to that of the fortress of Costești. The presence of the sanctuary, of other sophisticated structures, also of the walls supporting the terraces give the settlement a predominately civilian and religious character in the circumstances of a total lack of fortified elements. The archaeological excavations showed two levels of destruction for the settlement, obviously attached to the two Roman attacks¹⁰. According to these observations, the first level of the first terrace was destroyed following the campaign of 102; during the second war the dwellings on the upper level of the same terrace were destroyed by fire. The conclusion reached by the researchers was that the peace between the Roman emperor and the Dacian king was concluded beneath the walls of Sarmizegetusa Regia¹¹.

The complex of Sarmizegetusa Regia, all of its regions with their varied functions had only known one stage of destruction, both major and final in 106 A.D. It's probable that the precinct had been reconstructed before the war in 105 — 106 considering that after the peace in 102 the fortress had to be at least partly dismantled.

As regards the civilian settlements all along the valley, the information we

⁷ I. Glodariu, *Architectura dacilor...*, 1986, p. 91—93.

⁸ C. Daicoviciu, *Cetatea dacică de la Piatra Roșie*, p. 126

⁹ *Ibidem*..

¹⁰ H. Daicoviciu, I. Glodariu, *ActaMN*, VI, 1969, p. 471.

¹¹ H. Daicoviciu, I. Glodariu, I. Piso, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

have is widely dispersed and is seldom due to systematic research. The dwellings are to be found on compact settlements, like the one in Costești, scattered in groups throughout the valley, or concentrated in larger settlements with an appearance and functions that hint of urbanity (e.g. Sarmizegetusa Regia).

From the hundreds of sites that have been mentioned along the valley only a few have been actually studied. In all latter cases the presence of a single level of habitation has been noticed as well as evidence of final fire. The same observations are valid for the research undertaken in the Dacian farms on the Luncani Platform¹².

In the civilian "neighbourhoods" of Sarmizegetusa Regia, in many of the burned dwellings a large inventory was discovered which had remained under the fallen dwellings. I would like to mention a medical kit¹³ abandoned by its owner in moments when it would have proved useful. All this demonstrates the rapidity of the Roman assault and how unexpected it had been by the inhabitants. The same explanation is given for the rich inventory discovered beneath the burned structures excavated on the "Eight terrace" of Sarmizegetusa Regia¹⁴. It is also the case of the forge from another terrace called today "Căprăreășă", in the neighbourhood¹⁵.

The rise of a dwelling in Sarmizegetusa Regia built in front of the rampart which blocked the road from the civilian settlement to the sacred zone is highly relevant. The rampart must have been erected shortly before, or during, the first war. The peace of 102 once established the inhabitants have built before the rampart a dwelling underestimating the viability of the peace.

As regards the buildings on Rudele and Meleia mountains, near the capital, some have probably been abandoned before the wars, as they haven't been burned; others have burned. It is difficult to discern the circumstances under which these events have taken place. It is certain that the authors of these researches opt for an abandonment of some of the settlements on the face of the Roman advance (probably during the first war). The destruction of others was related to the raids of the moorish cavalry of Lusius Quietus, also during the first war. The final destruction of the dwellings with two levels of burning evidently took place in 106¹⁶.

Professor Ioan Glodariu thinks that these traces of burning represent a sign that indicates the route of the Roman army (of a part of it) on its attempt to surround the royal residence.

The fact that Sarmizegetusa Regia has only been conquered once and for good, in 106, is confirmed by the unique level of destruction from the sanctuaries of the sacred zone. The cult buildings on the area, for example the great circular temple, have ended in a devastating fire, archaeologically noticeable through a deep burn stratum. Above some of the cult edifices, Roman structures have been raised, evidently profane. The Dacian sanctuaries, as it has often been remarked have been systematically destroyed, not only by fire but also by being dismantled. Practically the difficulties faced today in order to reconstruct the elevation or even the plan are reinforced by the archaeological reality of the intentional dismantlement right to the foundations of the buildings. This fact is not necessarily related to the intention of recycling the building material for extending the

¹² For some dwellings investigated (from the entire area of Grădiște valley) see for example: H. Daicoviciu, *Materiale*, X, 1973, p. 76—77; H. Daicoviciu, Șt. Ferenczi, I. Glodariu, *op. cit.*, p. 188, et caetera.

¹³ C. Daicoviciu, N. Gostar, I. Crișan, *Materiale*, III, 1957, p. 260—263; for description, see I. Glodariu, *Dacian Trade with the Hellenistic and Roman World*, p. 213, no. 2.

¹⁴ C. Daicoviciu and collab., *SCIV*, III, 1952, p. 297—302; IV, 1953, p. 164—172.

¹⁵ I. Glodariu, *ActaMN*, XII, 1975, p. 107—134.

¹⁶ Cf. N. Gostar, H. Daicoviciu, *Materiale*, V, 1959, p. 387; VI, 1960, p. 345; I. Glodariu, *IMCD*, 1974, p. 162.

fortifications when the Roman troops were present in the former capital of the Dacian kingdom. Some of the andesite pillars were left in place (in the substructions of the sanctuaries) after being dismantled by chisel. One of the missions of the Roman troops stationed in Sarmizegetusa Regia was doubtlessly to avoid a resuscitation of religious activities in the area. The wellknown Roman tolerance to the people they had conquered by force (and especially to their religions) perished in front of the Dacian religious system, which, we suspect, was the core of the armed resistance. By corroborating the archaeological data with the insufficient literary information on the subject, the image of a state supported by religious ideology, capable to turn warriors into fanatics seems to take shape. The centralised religious structures once destroyed, along with the aristocracy, which stops appearing away the society of the new province organised by Trajan, led to the disappearance of the state structure. This we can explain the presence of Roman troops for more than 10 years after the foundation of the Roman province, in an area without any other strategic role than the fact that it could lead to a regrouping of the resistance around the places with a sacred significance. The total depopulation of the Grădiște valley by the Roman troops is connected to the same decision taken by the central military administration. So the end of this impressive demographical concentration, if we consider the unfavourable geographic aspect, had a similar fate to its beginnings (by decisions taken by the Dacian kings).

The population, on the face of the Roman attack, buried its implements (discoveries from Valea Largă¹⁷ and Strîmbu¹⁸) or the hoards of coins discovered accidentally during the last centuries.

In Dacia after the eradication of the state religion, and of the state itself, no comparable religious manifestations (stonebuilt sanctuaries, et caetera) ever took place, both in the Roman province or in the Dacian territories which remained free. Native life continues within the limits of a rural civilisation. In the area of the former capital of the free kingdom all continuity is interrupted, and it will be forgotten for centuries.

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¹⁷ H. Daicoviciu, *ActaMN*, I, 1964, p. 117.

¹⁸ I. Berciu, *Al. Popa, SCIV*, XIV, 1963, p. 151—161.